

Aging Gracefully....?

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She probed the corners of her eyes with gentle fingertips, peering intently at her reflection. Where did **that** come from?! She pushed lightly at the skin over her high cheekbones, frown lines forming in her forehead as the nudged flesh settled again. Realizing that her frown just showed her three more lines that she hadn't noticed before, she smoothed out her features yet again into an expression of calm and peace.

Scrutinizing her face so closely in the mirror, her attention riveted on the gentle crow's feet beginning at the corner of her eyes, the call from her headset surprised her. "Oracle, you there?"

Jumping guiltily, Barbara Gordon whirled around in her wheelchair to head toward her computer array. "Go ahead, Nightwing. What have you got?"

"Zip, Oracle... heading back to base, actually. Just wanted to check in."

A faint smile quirked her mouth. "See you shortly. Oracle out."

Slipping the headset off her ears and leaving it lying on the computer desk, Barbara raised her hands to her face. Her fingers traced across the lines at the corners of her eyes and mouth that she only noticed today. When had she begun getting lines on her face?

Looking in the mirror again, Barbara critically studied her features. She was a damn good looking woman, if she did say so herself. Deep

green eyes set in just the right place above a slim, straight nose. High cheekbones emphasized the strong jawline. Light red eyebrows and eyelashes were a bit of an annoyance, but at least she wasn't plagued by freckles. Her ivory skin had a healthy pink undertone to it. She was proud of her supple, muscular arms, with her slim hands and long piano-player's fingers. Her nails were kept to a practical length.

Continuing the self-critique, Barbara took mental inventory of her assets. Her eyes, certainly. Her dexterity was excellent. High, firm breasts weren't sagging ... yet. Small waist, flat tummy, even her legs weren't *so* bad. Physical therapy kept them from being flabby, though they certainly weren't one of her best assets anymore. There was a time, though.... no, it was pointless to dwell on that anyway. Her best feature, in her personal opinion, was the mass of coppery-red hair topped her head.

She reached up, her hands sliding luxuriously through the coppery-gold tresses. Suddenly halting, she looked in the mirror with a stunned expression. No. No WAY was she seeing that!

Very carefully, Barbara pulled one pure silvery-white strand out of the molten mass. "Oh... my... God..." She yanked the strand out of her head, wide green eyes just staring at it.

"Oracle? Are you well?"

The dark voice came out of nowhere, but the deep baritone was as familiar to her as her own lighter voice. Looking upward to meet the unyielding gaze of the caped and cowed Dark Knight, Barbara tried to hide the hair she was holding.

Wordlessly, Batman held out his hand. How long he'd been standing there, Barbara had no clue.

Looking sheepish, she placed the silver strand in his hand. He studied it carefully and looked back at her, his amusement hidden by the mask that covered his eyes. "Evidence?"

Barbara flushed uncomfortably. "No. Mine."

Though he was never one to engage in levity while in the cowl, the faint curl of his lips indicated the laughter he was suppressing. "I see." He handed the hair back to her.

Barbara took the hair and dumped it into the trash. "No, you don't see!" She groaned quietly, "It's *white*!"

Batman paused, as if uncertain what to say. "Barbara..."

"What?" Her voice was brittle with uncertainty.

Batman slipped the cowl from his head to allow Bruce Wayne to step into the apartment. Mildly, he responded, "I was going to say 'It's not so bad.'" The grin spread across his face. "Your first gray hair is not exactly the end of the world, take it from me. Although I have to admit that I didn't handle my own very well either."

Of all the people she thought she'd have this conversation with, Bruce Wayne was not at the head of the list. Curiously, Barbara

looked at the unmasked vigilante. "It just made me realize how much of my life I've spent doing this work. Do you ever wonder sometimes" She paused and trailed off.

In an uncharacteristic move, Bruce actually gave an answer to the unasked question. "Yes. I wonder if I'm actually doing anyone any good at all. And I wonder what my life would be if I decided to up and retire." He shook his head, "But then I stop some piece of scum from killing a man whose child waits at home for him to arrive... and it's worth what I've given up."

His voice was quiet as he continued briskly, "It doesn't mean that you or Dick or Tim need to give up all the things that I have, though. Your life is just that... your life. If you want other things from it, then do them."

Bruce stood and slipped the cowl back into place. "It's difficult to leave this life once you've chosen it. But it's not impossible. Good night, Barbara."

Listening to the almost silent swish of his cape, Barbara nodded slowly behind him. Her 29th birthday was just around the corner, and she was getting gray hair. Where had the time gone? When she looked again, Batman was gone. A wry smile crossed her features while she shook her head, marvelling at how good he was at the vanishing act.

Returning to her computers, Barbara began to shut down for the night. Nightwing would be arriving soon, and she decided that when he arrived, she would surreptitiously check and see if he was showing any signs in that beautiful head of dark hair of going gray. It would make her feel better to find one on him too, so there. He wasn't THAT much younger than she, surely there must be some little thing....

End
file.